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INFO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD IMMEDIATE 0273
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 2424
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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL IMMEDIATE 5886
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA IMMEDIATE 4082
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 005059

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TAGS: PGOV PREL MOPS JA

SUBJECT: FUKUDA FAILS TO GAIN SUPPORT FOR OEF IN FIRST
MEETING WITH OZAWA

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer, reasons
1.4(b),(d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Prime Minister Fukuda and opposition leader Ichiro Ozawa appear to have accomplished little in their first face-to-face talks on October 30, but did agree to continue talking later in the week, according to Embassy contacts and press reporting. LDP and DPJ party heads have held similar discussions in the past, but Ozawa has refused to meet with Fukuda and his predecessor. The two reportedly consulted on a number of legislative issues, including the possible continuation of Japanese refueling efforts in the Indian Ocean, but said they did not discuss extension of the current Diet session, dissolution of the Lower House, or the next general election. The party leaders agreed to postpone their long-awaited first Diet debate, originally scheduled for October 31, until after their next meeting on November 2.
End summary.

¶2. (C) Prime Minister and President of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party Yasuo Fukuda and main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) leader Ichiro Ozawa met at the Diet building for approximately 80 minutes on October 30, in their first meeting as party leaders. Speaking at separate press conferences after the meeting, the two party leaders said they had exchanged ideas on a number of current issues, including Japan's support for Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and problems in the pension system. Both said they did not discuss extension of the extraordinary Diet session, dissolution of the Lower House, or the next general election.

Fukuda told the press that they had failed to resolve any issues during the meeting. Ozawa held to his tough stance on the government's proposed anti-terror bill, saying the DPJ would "cooperate where we can," but could not support the new measure. Both pointed out that they had agreed during the meeting to postpone their much anticipated first Diet debate, scheduled for October 31, in order to continue discussions later in the week, most likely on November 2.

¶3. (C) News reports portrayed the discussions as a last-ditch attempt by Prime Minister Fukuda to reach some sort of agreement with the opposition prior to the expiration of the

current Anti-Terror Special Measures Law on November 1. Fukuda reportedly hoped to get a better sense from the meeting of whether it is worth extending the ongoing extraordinary Diet session beyond its scheduled November 10 closing date in order to continue debate on the bill. Ozawa has already labeled MSDF operations in support of Operation Enduring Freedom to be unconstitutional, and the DPJ has shown no signs of compromising on that or any other legislation in the Diet session thus far. Deliberations on the OEF bill, meanwhile, have fallen prey to opposition investigations into two recent Defense Ministry scandals. The press also fueled speculation that Ozawa would try to use his negotiating power on the OEF bill to demand an early dissolution of the Lower House and force new elections. Prior to the meeting, LDP Secretary General Bunmei is reported to have counseled Fukuda against giving any ground to Ozawa on those two points.

¶4. (C) The meeting was requested by Prime Minister Fukuda, and hastily arranged on October 29 by the Diet Affairs Chairmen of the two parties. The Diet Affairs Chairmen and party Secretaries General attended the first five minutes of the meeting, before leaving the two leaders alone for a private discussion. LDP and DPJ leaders have held similar discussions in the past, but Ozawa had never met with either Fukuda or his predecessor before today. In fact, Ozawa's flat refusal to meet with Abe on the day he resigned has been cited as one reason Abe decided to step down. Press coverage surrounding the meeting was intense.

¶5. (C) Embassy contacts speculate that Fukuda was eager to meet with Ozawa this week in order to show the Japanese public and the international community that he has done all

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he could to win passage of the OEF legislation. Ozawa, who was dismissive of earlier overtures for cooperation, may have conceded to Fukuda's request for the same reason. If that is true, the reasons for a follow-on meeting are less clear, these contacts note. One possibility is that the leaders actually did reach some sort of agreement, and need time to work the issue through their respective party leaderships. It may also be that they have issues left to discuss, including possible dissolution of the Lower House and the next Lower House election.

SCHIEFFER